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A SERMON
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BY C. H. SPURGEON,
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*“Or despise you the riches of His goodness and forbearance and long-suffering;
not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?”
Romans 2:4.*

THE apostle is intensely personal in his address. This verse is not spoken to us all in the mass, but to some one in particular. The apostle fixes his eyes upon a single person, and speaks to him as “You.” “Despise *you* the riches of His goodness and forbearance and long-suffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leads *you* to repentance?” It should always be the intent of the preacher to convey his message to each hearer in his own separate individuality. It is always a very happy sign when a man begins to think of himself as an individual, and when the exhortations and invitations of the gospel are seen by him to be directed to himself personally. I will give nothing for that indirect, essay-like preaching which is as the sheet lightning of summer, dazzling for the moment, and flaming over a broad expanse, but altogether harmless, since no bolt is launched from it, and its ineffectual fires leave no trace behind. I will give nothing for that kind of hearing which consists in the word being heard by everybody in general and by no one in particular. It is when the preacher can, “You” his hearers that he is likely to do them good. When each man is made to say, “This is for me,” then the power of God is present in the word. One personal, intentional touch of the hem of Christ’s garment conveys more blessing than all the pressure of the crowd that thronged about the Master. The laying of His healing hand upon the individual who was suffering had more virtue in it than all those heavenly addresses which fell from His lips upon minds that did not receive the truth for themselves. I do pray that we may come to personal dealings with the Lord each one for himself, and that the Spirit of God may convince each man and each woman according as the case may stand before the living God. O my hearer, *you* are now to be lovingly spoken with. I speak not to *you* as unto many, but unto *you*, as one by yourself.

Observe that the apostle singled out an individual who had condemned others for transgressions, in which he himself indulged. This man acknowledged so much spiritual light that he knew right from wrong, and he diligently used his knowledge to judge others, condemning them for their transgressions. As for himself, he preferred the shade, where no fierce light might beat on his own conscience and disturb his unholy peace. His judgment was spared the pain of dealing with his own offenses by being set to work upon the faults of others. He had a candle, but he did not place it on the table to light his own room, he held it out at the front door to inspect his neighbors who passed by. Ho! My good friend, my sermon is for you. Paul looks this man in the face and says, “Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are, that judges: for in which you judge another you condemn yourself; for you that judges do the same things.” And then he pointedly says to him, “Do you think, O man that judges them which do such things, and do the same, that you shall escape the judgment of God?” Well did the apostle aim that piercing arrow. It hits the center of the target and strikes a folly common to mankind.

The poet of the night-watches wrote—

“All men think all men mortal but themselves.”

As truly might I say, “All men think all men guilty but themselves.” The punishment which is due to sin, the guilty reckon to be surely impending upon others, but they scarcely believe that it can ever fall upon themselves. A personal doom for themselves is an idea which they will not harbor. If the dread thought should light upon them, they shake it off as men shake snowflakes from their cloaks. The thought of personal guilt, judgment and condemnation is inconvenient, it breeds too much trouble within, and so they refuse it lodging. Vain men go meandering on their way, whispering of peace and safety, doting as if God had passed an act of amnesty and oblivion for them, and had made for them an exception to all the

rules of justice, and all the manner of His courts. Do men indeed believe that they alone shall go unpunished? No man will subscribe to that notion when it is written down in black and white, and yet the mass of men live as if this were true. I mean the mass of men who have sufficient light to condemn sin in others. They start back from the fact of their own personal guilt and condemnation, and go on in their ungodliness as if there were no great white throne for them, no last judgment, no judge, no word of condemnation, and no hell of wrath. Alas, poor madmen, thus to dream! O Spirit of Truth, save them from this fatal infatuation.

Sin is always on the downward slope, so that when a man proceeds a certain length he inevitably goes beyond it. The person addressed by the apostle first thought to escape judgment, and then he came to think lightly of the goodness, forbearance and long-suffering of God. He thinks he shall escape in the future, and because of that he despises the present goodness and long-suffering of the Most High. Of course he does. If he does not believe in the terrors of the world to come for himself, he naturally reckons it to be a small thing to have been spared their immediate experience. Barren tree as he is, he does not believe that he will ever be cut down, and therefore, he feels no gratitude to the dresser of the vineyard for pleading, "Let it alone yet another year, till I dig about it, and fertilize it." I wish, as God shall help me, to drive hard at the consciences of men upon this matter. I would be to you, my careless friend, what Jonah was to Nineveh. I would warn you and bestir you to repentance. Oh that the Holy Spirit would make this sermon effectual for the awakening of every unsaved soul that shall hear or read it.

I. First, let me speak this morning to you, O unregenerate, impenitent man, concerning THE GOODNESS OF GOD WHICH YOU HAVE EXPERIENCED. You have known the goodness, and forbearance and long-suffering of God. According to the text, "riches" of these have been spent upon unconverted, ungodly men, and upon you as one of them. Let me speak with you first, O man, and remind you how favored you have been of God by being made a partaker of "the riches of His goodness." In many cases this is true of temporal things. Men may be without the fear of God, and yet, for all that, God may be pleased to prosper their endeavors in business. They succeed almost beyond their expectation—I mean some of them, probably the description applies to you. They rise from the lowest position, and accumulate about them the comforts and luxuries of life. Though they have no religion, they have wit, and prudence, and thrift, and so they compete with others, and God permits them to be winners in the race for wealth. Moreover, He allows them to enjoy good health, vigor of mind, and strength of constitution. They are happy in the wife of their youth, and their children are about them. Theirs is an envied lot. Death seems for a while forbidden to knock at their door, even though he has been ravaging the neighborhood. Even sickness does not molest their household. They are not in trouble as other men, neither are they plagued like other men. Abraham had to prepare a Machpelah, and David mourned over his sons, but these have had to make scant provision for a family sepulcher. A hedge has in very deed been set about them and all that they have. I know that it is thus with many who do not love God, and have never yielded to the entreaties of His grace. They love not the hand which enriches them. They praise not the Lord who daily loads them with benefits. How is it that men can receive such kindness and yield no return? O sirs, you are today blessed with all that need requires, but I pray you remember that you might have been in the depths of poverty. An illness would have lost you your situation, or a slight turn in trade would have left you bankrupt. You are well today, but you might have been tossing to and fro upon a bed of sickness. You might have been in the hospital, about to lose a limb. Shall not God be praised for health and freedom from pain? You might have been shut up in yonder asylum, in the agonies of madness. A thousand ills have been kept from you. You have been exceedingly favored by the goodness of the Most High. Is it not so? And truly, it is an amazing thing that God should give His bread to those who lift up their heel against Him, that He should cause His light to shine upon those who never perceive His goodness, that He should multiply His mercies upon ungodly men who only multiply their rebellions against Him, and turn the gifts of His love into instruments of transgression.

Furthermore, this goodness of God had not only come to you in a temporal form, O impenitent man, but it has also visited you in a spiritual manner. Myriads of our fellow men have never had an opportunity of knowing Christ. The missionary's foot has never trodden the cities in which they dwell, and so they die in the dark. Multitudes are going downward, downward, but they do not know the upward road. Their minds have never been enlightened by the teachings of God's Word, and therefore they sin with

less grievousness of fault. You are placed in the very focus of Christian light, and yet you follow evil! Will you not think of this? Time was when a man would have to work for years to earn enough money to buy a Bible. There were times when he could not have earned one even with that toil. Now the word of God lies upon your table, you have a copy of it in almost every room of your house, is not this a gift from God? This is the land of the open Bible, and the land of the preached Word of God, in this you prove the riches of God's goodness. Do you despise this wealth of mercy? Possibly you have enjoyed the further privilege of sitting under a ministry which has been particularly plain and earnest. You have not had sermons preached *before* you, they have been preached *at* you. The minister has seized upon you and tugged at your conscience, as though he would force you to the Savior. With cries and entreaties you have been invited to your heavenly Father, and yet you have not come. Is this a small thing?

What is more, you have been favored with a tender conscience. When you do wrong you know it, and smart for it. What do those wakeful nights mean after you have yielded to a temptation? What does that miserable feeling of shame mean? That fever of unrest? You find it hard to stifle the inward monitor, and difficult to resist the Spirit of God. Your road to hell is made peculiarly hard. Do you mean to follow it at all costs, and go over hedge and ditch to hell?

You have not only been awakened by conscience, but the good Spirit has strived with you. You have been almost persuaded to be a Christian. Such has been the blessed work of the Spirit upon your heart that you have at times been melted down, and ready to be molded by grace. A strange softness has come over you, and if you had not gathered up all your evil strength, and if the devil had not helped you to resist, you would have by this time dropped into the Savior's arms. Oh, the riches of the goodness of God to have thus wooed you, and pressed His love upon you! You have scarcely had a stripe, or a frown, or an ill word from God. His ways have been all kindness, and gentleness, and long-suffering from the first day of your memory until now. "Despise you the riches of His goodness?" O man, answer this, I implore you.

The apostle then dwells upon the riches of "*forbearance*." Forbearance comes in when men having offended, God withholds the punishment that is due them. When men, having been invited to mercy, have refused it, and yet God continues to stretch out His hands, and invites them to come to Him. Patient endurance of offenses and insults has been manifested by God to many of you, who now hear these words of warning. The Lord knows to whom I speak, and may He make you, also, know that I am speaking to you, even to you. Some men have gone back to the very sin of which for a while they repented. They have suffered for their folly, but have turned again to it with suicidal determination. They are desperately set on their own ruin, and nothing can save them. The burnt child has run to the fire again. The singed moth has plunged again into the flame of the candle. Who can pity such self-inflicted miseries? They are given over to perdition, for they will not be warned. They have returned to the haunt of vice, though they seemed to have been snatched from the deep ditch of its filthiness. They have wantonly and willfully returned to their cups, though the poison of former draughts is yet burning in their veins. Yet, despite this folly, God shows forbearance towards them. They have grievously provoked Him when they have done despite to His Word, and have even turned to laughter the solemnities of His worship, against their own consciences, and to their own confusion. Yet when God's hand has been lifted up He has withdrawn it in mercy. See how God has always tempered His providence with kindness to them. He laid them low so that they were sorely sick, but at the voice of their moaning He restored them. They trembled on the brink of death, yet He permitted them to recover strength. And now, despite their vows of amendment, here they are, callous and careless, unmindful of the mercy which gave them a reprieve.

Did you ever think what is included in the riches of forbearance? There are quick-tempered individuals who only need to be a little provoked, and hard words and blows come quick and furious. But, oh, the forbearance of God when He is provoked to His face by ungodly men! By men, I mean, those who hear His Word and yet refuse it! They slight His love, and yet He perseveres in it. Justice lays its hand on the sword, but mercy holds it back in its scabbard. Well might each spared one say—

*"O unexhausted grace
O Love unspeakable!
I am not gone to my own place;*

*I am not yet in hell!
 Earth does not open yet,
 My soul to swallow up:
 And, hanging o'er the burning pit,
 I still am forced to hope."*

Our apostle adds to goodness and forbearance the riches of "*long-suffering*." We draw a distinction between forbearance and long-suffering. Forbearance has to do with the magnitude of sin, long-suffering with the multiplicity of it. Forbearance has to do with present provocation, long-suffering relates to that provocation repeated, and continued for a length of time. Oh, how long does God suffer the ill manners of men! Forty years long He was grieved with that generation whose carcasses fell in the wilderness. Has it come to forty years yet with you, dear hearer? Possibly it may have passed even that time, and a half-century of provocation may have gone into eternity to bear witness against you. What if I should even have to say that sixty and seventy years have continued to heap up the loads of their transgressions, until the Lord says, "I am pressed down under your sins. As a cart that is full of sheaves, I am pressed down under you"? Yet for all that, here you are on praying ground and pleading terms with God. Here you are where yet the Savior reigns upon the throne of grace. Here you are where mercy is to be had for the asking, where free grace and dying love ring out their charming bells of invitation to joy and peace! Oh, the riches of His goodness, and forbearance and long-suffering. Three-fold is the claim, will you not regard it? Can you continue to despise it?

I should like to set all this in a striking light if I could, and therefore, I would remind you of who and what that God is who has exhibited this goodness, forbearance and long-suffering to men. Remember how *great* He is. When men insult a great prince, the offense is thought to be highly heinous. If anyone should openly insult our own beloved Queen, and continue to do so, the entire nation would be clamorous to have the impertinence ended speedily. We cannot bear that a beloved ruler should be publicly insulted. And what do you think of the sin which provokes God, which to His face defies Him, and in His very courts resists Him? Shall this always be forborne with? Is there not a limit to long-suffering? *Goodness* also adds another item to the provocation, for we naturally say, "Why should one so good be treated so cruelly?" If God were a tyrant, if He were unrighteous or unkind, it was not so much amiss that men stood out against Him. But when His very name is love, and when He manifests the heart of a Father towards His wandering children, it is shameful that He should be so wantonly provoked. Those words of Jesus were extremely touching when He pointed to His miracles and asked, "For which of these things do you stone Me?" When I think of God I may well ask—"For which of His deeds do you provoke Him?" Every morning He draws the curtain and gladdens the earth with light, and gives *you* eyes to see it. He sends His rain upon the ground to bring forth bread for man, and He gives *you* life to eat thereof—is this a ground for revolting from Him? Every single minute of our life is cheered with the tender kindness of God, and every spot is gladdened with His love. I am amazed that the Lord does not sweep away the moral nuisance of a guilty race from off the face of earth. Man's sin must have been terribly offensive to God from day to day, and yet He still shows kindness, love, forbearance. This adds an excessive venom to man's disobedience. How can he grieve such goodness? How can divine goodness fail to resent such base ingratitude?

Think also of God's *knowledge*, for He knows all the transgressions of men. "What the eye does not see, the heart does not rue," is a truthful proverb. But every transgression is committed in the very presence of God, so that penitent David cried, "Against You, You only have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight." Transgression is committed in the sight of God, from whose eyes nothing is hidden. Remember also, that the Lord can never forget. Before His eyes all things stand out in clear light, not only the things of today, but all the transgressions of a life. Yet for all this, He does forbear. With evil reeking before His face, He is slow to anger, and waits that He may be gracious.

All this while, remember, the Lord is great in *power*. Some are patient because they are powerless. They bear and forbear because they cannot well help themselves, but it is not so with God. Had He but willed it, you had been swept into hell. Only a word from Him and the impenitent had fallen in the wilderness, and their spirits would have passed into the realms of endless woe. In a moment the Lord could have eased Him of His adversary. He could have stopped that flippant tongue, and closed those lustful

eyes in an instant. That wicked heart would have failed to beat if God had withdrawn His power, and that rebellious breath would have ceased also. Had it not been for long-suffering, you unbelievers would long since have known what it is to fall into the hands of an angry God. Will you continue to grieve the God who so patiently bears with you?

Be it never forgotten that sin is to God much more intolerable than it is to us. He is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity. Things which we call little sins are great and grievous evils to Him. They do, as it were, touch the apple of His eye. “Oh, do not,” He says, “do not this abominable thing that I hate!” His Spirit is grieved and vexed with every idle word and every sensual thought, and therefore it is a wonder of wonders that a God so sensitive of sin, a God so able to avenge Himself of His adversaries, a God who knows the abundance of human evil, and marks it all, should, nevertheless, exhibit riches of goodness and forbearance and long-suffering. Yet this is what you, my ungodly hearer, have been experiencing many a long year. Here let us pause, and oh that each one who is still unsaved would sing most sincerely the words of Watts—

*“Lord, we have long abused Your love,
Too long indulged our sin.
Our aching hearts even bleed to see
What rebels we have been.
No more, you lusts, shall you command,
No more will we obey!
Stretch out, O God,
Your conquering hand,
And drive Your foes away.”*

II. Come with me, friend, and let me speak to you of THE SIN OF WHICH YOU ARE SUSPECTED. Hear me, unconverted sinner. The sin of which you are suspected is this—“Despise you the riches of His goodness and forbearance and long-suffering?” The Lord’s goodness ought to be admired and to be adored, and do you despise it? His goodness ought to be wondered at and told as a marvel in the ears of others, and do you despise it? Lend me your ear, that I may rake your conscience a little.

Some despise God’s goodness, forbearance and long-suffering because they *never even gave a thought to it*. God has given you life to keep you in being, and He has indulged you with His kindness, but it has not yet occurred to you that this patience is at all remarkable or worthy of the smallest thanks. You have been a drunk, have you? A swearer? A Sabbath-breaker? A lover of sinful pleasure? Perhaps not quite so, but still you have forgotten God altogether, and yet He has abounded in goodness to you. Is not this a great wrong? The Lord says, “Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me. The ox knows his owner and the ass his master’s crib: but these, My creatures do not know, My favored ones do not consider.” Why, you have no such forbearance with others as God has had with you. You would not keep a dog if it never followed at your heel, but snarled at you. You would not even keep a potter’s vessel if it held no water, and was of no service to you. You would break it in pieces, and throw it on the dunghill. As for yourself, you are fearfully and wonderfully made, both as to your body and as to your soul, and yet you have been of no service to your Maker, nor even thought of being of service to Him. Still, He has spared you all these years, and it has never occurred to you that there has been any wonderful forbearance in it. Assuredly, O man, you despise the long-suffering of your God.

Others have, perhaps, thought of it, but *have never seriously meditated thereon*. When we offend a man, if we are right-minded, we not only note the fact with regret, but we sit down and weigh the matter, and seek to rectify it. For we would not be unjust to any person and if we felt that we had been acting unfairly it would press upon our minds until we could make amends. But are there not some of you who have never given half an hour’s consideration to your relation to your God? He has spared you all this while, and yet it has never occurred to you to enter into your chamber and sit down and consider your conduct towards Him. It would seem to be too much trouble even to think of your Creator. His long-suffering leads you to repentance, but you have not repented. In fact, you have not thought it worth your while to consider the question at all. You have thought it far more important to inquire, “What shall I eat and what shall I drink?” Bread and broadcloth have shut out the thought of God. Ah me, you will stand

at His judgment bar before long—and then? Perhaps before this week is finished you may have to answer, not to me, but to Him that sits upon the throne. Therefore I do implore you now, for the first time give this matter thought. Despise no longer the goodness and long-suffering of God.

This long-suffering is despised, further, by those who have *imagined that God does not take any great account of what they do*. So long as they do not go into gross and open sin, and offend the laws of their country, they do not believe that it is of any consequence whether they love God or not, whether they do righteousness or not, whether they are sober and temperate, or drunken and wanton, whether they are clean in heart by God's Spirit, or defiled in soul and life. You think that God is altogether such a one as yourself, and that He will wink at your transgression and cover up your sin, but you shall not find it so. That base thought proves that you despise His long-suffering.

Some even get to think that the warnings of love are so much wind, and *that the threats of God will never be fulfilled*. They have gone on for many years without being punished, and instead of drawing to the conclusion that the longer the blow is in falling, the heavier it will be when it does come, they imagine that because it is long delayed the judgment will never come at all. And so they sport and trifle between the jaws of death and hell. They hear warnings as if they were all moonshine, and fancy that this holy Book, with its threats, is but a bugaboo to keep fools quiet. If you think so sir, then indeed you have despised the goodness and forbearance and long-suffering of God. Do you imagine that this forbearance will last forever? Do you dream that at least it will continue with you for many years? I know your secret thoughts. You see other men die suddenly, but your secret thought is that you will have long space and ample time. You hear of one struck down with paralysis, and another carried off by apoplexy, but you flatter yourselves that you will have plenty of leisure time to think about these things. Oh, how can you be so secure? How can you thus tempt the Lord? False prophets in these evil days play into men's hands and hold out the hope that you may go into the next world wrong, and yet be set right in the end. This is a vile flattery of your wicked hearts. Remember that even according to their rambling, centuries may elapse before this fancied restoration may occur. A sensible man would not like to run the risk of even a year of agony. Half-an-hour of acute pain is dreaded by most people. Can it be that the very men, who start back from the dentist's door, afraid of the pinch which extricates an aching tooth, will run the risk of years of misery? Take the future of the impenitent even on this footing, it is a thing to be dreaded, and by every means avoided. I say, these flattering prophets themselves, if rightly understood, give you little enough of hope. But what will come of you if the old doctrine proves to be true and you go away into everlasting fire in hell, as the Scripture puts it? Will you live an hour in jeopardy of such a doom? Will you so despise the long-suffering and forbearance of the Lord?

I will not enlarge and use many words, for I am myself weary of words. I want to persuade you even with tears. My whole soul would attract you to your God, your Father. I would come to close quarters with you and ask—Do you not think that, even though you fall into no doctrinal error, and indulge no hazy hope as to either restitution or annihilation, yet still it is a dreadful despising of God's mercy when you keep on playing with God, and saying to His grace, “Go Your way for this time; when I have a more convenient season I will send for You”? The gentler God is, the more you procrastinate, and the more in tenderness He speaks of pardon, the more you transgress. Is this generous? Is it right? Is it wise? Can it be a fit and proper thing to do? Oh, my dear hearer, why will you act thus shamefully? Some of you delight to come and hear me preach, and drink in all I have to say, and you will even commend me for being earnest with your souls. And yet, after all, you will not decide for God, for Christ, for heaven. You are between good and evil, neither cold nor hot. I would you were either cold or hot. I would even wish that you either thought this word of mine to be false, or else that, believing it to be true, you at once acted upon it. How can you incur the double guilt of offending God and of knowing that it is an evil thing to do so? You reject Christ and yet admit that He ought to be received by you! You speak well of a gospel which you will not accept for yourselves! You believe great things of a Savior whom you will not have to be your Savior! Jesus Himself says, “If I tell you the truth, why do you not believe Me?”

“Do you despise the long-suffering of God?” Dare you do it? I tremble as I think of a man despising God's goodness. Is not this practical blasphemy? Do you dare do it? Oh, if you have done it up to now, do it no more. Before yon sun goes down again, say within your heart, “I will be a despiser of God's

goodness no longer. I will arise and go unto my Father, and I will say unto Him—Father, I have sinned. I will not rest until in the precious blood You have washed my sins away.”

III. In closing this sermon I desire to remind you, O ungodly man, of THE KNOWLEDGE OF WHICH YOU ARE FORGETFUL. Read my text—“Despise you the riches of His goodness and forbearance and long-suffering; *not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?*” Now there are many here who know as a matter of doctrine, that the goodness of God leads them to repentance, and yet they do not know it as a practical truth affecting their lives. Indeed, they act as if it is not true to them at all. Yet, if they do not know this they are willfully ignorant, not willing to retain in their minds a fact so disagreeable to them. None are as blind as those who will not see. But he who does not see, and yet has eyes, has a criminality about his blindness which is not found in those who have no sight. Dear hearer, whether you know this truth or not, I would remind you that God’s patience with you is meant to lead you to repentance. “How?” you ask. Why, first by *giving you an opportunity to repent*. These years, which are now coming to a considerable number with you, have been given to you in order that you might turn to God. By the time you were twenty-one you had sinned quite enough. Perhaps you had even then begun to mislead other youths, and to instruct in evil those under your influence. Why did not God take you away at once? It might have been for the benefit of the world if He had done so. But yet you were spared till you were thirty. Did not each year of your lengthened life prove that the Lord was saying, “I will spare Him, for perhaps He will yet amend and think upon His God. I will give Him more light, and increase His comforts. I will give Him better teaching, better preaching. Perhaps he will repent”? Yet you have not done so. Have you lived to be forty, and are you where you were when you were twenty? Are you still out of Christ? Then you are worse than you were, for you have sinned more deeply and you have provoked the Lord more terribly. You have now had space enough. What more do you need? When the child has offended, you say, “Child, unless you beg pardon at once, I must punish you.” Would you give a boy so many minutes to repent in as God has given you years? I think not. If a servant is continually robbing you, if he is careless, slothful, disobedient, you say to him, “I have passed over your faults several times, but one of these days I shall discharge you. I cannot always put up with this slovenliness, this blundering, and this idleness. One of these times you will have to go.” Have you not so spoken to your female servant, and thought it kind on your part to give her another chance? The Lord has said the same to you. Yet here you are, a living but impenitent man, spared, but spared only to multiply your transgressions. Know that His forbearance gives you an opportunity to repent. Do not turn it into an occasion for hardening your heart.

But next, the Lord in this is pleased to give *a suggestion to you to repent*. It seems to me that every morning when a man wakes up still impenitent, and finds himself out of hell, the sunlight seems to say, “I shine on you yet another day, so that in this day you may repent.” When your bed receives you at night, I think it seems to say, “I will give you another night’s rest that you may live to turn from your sins and trust in Jesus.” Every mouthful of bread that comes to the table says, “I have to support your body that you may still have space for repentance.” Every time you open the Bible the pages say, “We speak with you that you may repent.” Every time you hear a sermon, if it is such a sermon as God would have us preach, it pleads with you to turn unto the Lord and live. Surely the years of your life may suffice you to have worked the will of the Gentiles. “The times of your ignorance, God winked at, but now commands men everywhere to repent.” Do not, life and death, heaven and hell, call upon you to do so? Thus you have in God’s goodness space for repentance, and a suggestion to repent.

But something more is here, for I want you to notice that the text does not say, “The goodness of God *calls* you to repentance,” but, “*Leads* you.” This is a much stronger word. God calls to repentance by the gospel. God *leads to repentance* by His goodness. It is as though He plucked at your sleeve and said, “Come this way.” His goodness lays its gentle hand on you, drawing you with cords of love and bands of a man. God’s forbearance cries, “Why will you hate Me? What wrong have I done to you? I have spared you. I have spared your wife and children. I have raised you up from the bed of sickness. I have loaded your cupboard. I have filled your wardrobe. I have done you a thousand good turns. Why do you disobey Me? Turn unto your God and Father and live in Christ Jesus.”

If, on the other hand, you have not received rich temporal favors, yet the Lord still leads you to repentance by a rougher hand. As when the prodigal would gladly have filled his belly with husks, but

could not, and the pangs of hunger came upon him, those pains were a powerful message from the Father to lead him to the home where there was bread enough and to spare. “The goodness of God leads you to repentance.” Oh, that you would yield to its sweet leadings, and follow as a child follows the guidance of a nurse. Let your crosses lead you to the cross. Let your joys lead you to find joy in Christ.

Do you not think that all this should *encourage you to repent*, since God Himself leads you that way? If God leads you to repentance He does not mean to cast you away. If He bids you repent, then He is willing to accept your repentance, and to be reconciled to you. If He bids you change your mind, it is because His own mind is love. Repentance implies a radical change in your view of things, and in your estimate of matters. It is a change in your purposes, a change in your thoughts and in your conduct. If the Lord leads you that way, He will help you in it. Follow His gracious leading till His divine Spirit shall lead you with still greater power and still greater efficacy, till at last you find that He has worked in you both repentance and faith, and you are saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation. If “the goodness of God leads you to repentance,” then be sure of this, that the goodness of God will receive you when you do repent, and you shall live in His sight as His well-beloved and forgiven child.

I close now, but I am sorry to do so, for I have not pleaded one-half as I could have wished. Yet what more can I say? I will put it to yourselves. If you were in God’s place, could you bear to be treated as you have treated Him? If you were all goodness and tenderness, and had borne with a creature now for thirty or forty years, how would you bear to see that creature still stand out, and even draw an inference from your gentleness to encourage him in his rebellion? Would you not say, “Well, if my long-suffering makes him think little of sin, I will change my method. If tenderness cannot win him, I must leave him. If even my love does not affect him, I will leave him alone. He is given unto his evil ways—I will cease from him, and see what his end will be”? O Lord, say not so, say not so unto anyone in this house! But of Your great mercy make this day to be the beginning of life to many. Oh that hearts may be touched with pity for their slighted Savior, that they may seek His face! Here is the only way of salvation, “Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved.” You know how the Master bade us put it. “Go you into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature: he that believes and is baptized shall be saved.” First, we are to preach faith, whereby we lay hold on Christ, then baptism, whereby we confess that faith, and acknowledge that we are dead and buried with Christ that we may live with Him in newness of life. Those are the two points He bids us set before you, and I do set them before you. Weary, but not quite wearied out, O impenitent man, I plead with you! Though you have so often been pleaded with in vain, once more I speak with you in Christ’s place, and say—Repent of your sin. Look to your Savior, and confess your faith in His own appointed way. I verily believe that if I had been pleading with some of you to save the life of a dog, I would have prevailed with you a great while ago. And will you not care about the saving of your own souls? Oh, strange infatuation—that, men will not consent to be themselves saved, but foolishly, madly, hold out against the mercy of God which leads them to repentance. God bless you, beloved, and may none of you despise His goodness, and forbearance and long-suffering.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—LUKE 13:1-17.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—103, 516, 518.**

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